



Restoring Brownfields for Residential Reuse Puts EPA Right at Home



RESIDENTIAL REUSES

The value of EPA's Brownfields Program reaches beyond the restoration of former commercial and industrial sites for the same—though more environmentally conscious—end uses. The Program is also enjoying considerable success in facilitating brownfields restoration for residential reuse. Typically, the public or private sector developer works with the state—often as part of a state voluntary cleanup program—to ensure that sites do not exceed certain contamination levels deemed acceptable by the state for residential reuse. This can be done either through active cleanup or by confirming that the site is not contaminated according to state rules.

Using brownfields as new residential space complements a recent trend in site development, spurred by a nationwide shift toward urban relocation. The country's "reverse suburbanization" is based on a desire for convenience as traffic becomes an increasing burden in major cities. People understandably want to avoid long, daily commutes and desire easier access to the restaurants and events that might once have drawn them to the city only on weekends.

EPA's Brownfields Program has helped cities across the country respond to these development trends. In Emeryville, California, a former industrial site was transformed into 220 residential housing units, using nearly \$20 million in private investment leveraged through the city's \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment Pilot. The Pilot worked with the City of Emeryville to rejuvenate an economically distressed area, targeting 10 sites and more than 180 acres for cleanup and redevelopment. The Pilot established strong working relationships among the city's regulatory agencies, facilitating a plan between the city and a local development corporation to redevelop an abandoned former railyard. Now fully occupied, these 220 new apartments include a 1,800-square-foot community room and 7,500 square feet of retail space and have won several awards for their design.

With a population of nearly 80,000 within its 4.2-square-mile area, Somerville, Massachusetts, is the most densely populated municipality in New England. Idle property, such as a 51,500-square-foot

JUST THE FACTS:

- In Emeryville, California, a former industrial site was transformed into 220 residential housing units, using nearly \$20 million in private investment leveraged through Brownfields Pilot.
- Somerville, Massachusetts converted a contaminated, former mattress factory into a 97-unit, assisted-living facility.
- The City of Virginia, Minnesota's Brownfields Pilot is transforming a former brownfield into a \$7.2 million assisted living facility that includes special care for Alzheimer's patients.

Using brownfields as new residential space complements a recent, overall trend in site development, spurred by a nationwide shift toward urban relocation. This "reverse suburbanization" is based on a desire for convenience as traffic problems mount in major cities.

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building at 259 Lowell Street, is something the city can ill afford. Originally an industrial baking operation, the structure had been occupied by a series of mattress manufacturers and outlet stores until its abandonment in 1995. The building subsequently fell into disrepair and became a safety concern and an eyesore for local residents. Partially due to fears of site contamination, there was limited developer interest in the site. This changed in 1996, when Somerville was selected as an EPA Brownfields Pilot and received a \$100,000 grant to generate activity on sites like the one on Lowell Street.

After learning of Somerville's Brownfields Pilot award, the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) approached the city with an interest in purchasing and re-developing the mattress factory property, depending on the Pilot's assessment results. Soil and groundwater tests revealed lead, petroleum, and barium contamination, with an estimated cleanup cost of \$225,000. To encourage the VNA to move forward with plans to redevelop the property into a 100-unit, assisted-living facility and neighborhood health center, Somerville provided \$100,000 in cleanup cost-overrun coverage. In response to the site's new and promising future, resources for the project rapidly mushroomed. The Federal Home Loan Bank agreed to a \$1.25 million loan and a \$250,000 grant; the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) awarded \$5.9 million in low-income housing tax credits; \$750,000 in low-interest loans have been granted by the DHCD and the City of Somerville; the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust fund earmarked a \$150,000 loan for the project; and the Massachusetts Housing Partnership provided a \$5.4 million Affordable Housing loan. The VNA's new, 97-unit, assisted-living facility opened in June 2000, and every unit was occupied by the end of that summer.

EPA's Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Brownfields Pilot partnered with the Minnesota Environmental Initiative and Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to perform brownfields assessments in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, on sites to be used for affordable housing. The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council oversees redevelopment for the seven-county metropolitan area, which has a population of 2.2 million, and has identified 3,000 acres of brownfields within that area. While not all of these properties are suitable for residential reuse, the Brownfields Pilot verified through environmental assessments that seven Twin Cities properties owned by Habitat for Humanity were free of contaminants. In addition to funding these assessments, the Brownfields Pilot has leveraged \$415,361 thus far, including in-kind services from consulting firms for environmental assessment work.

To date, three single-family homes have been built on one property at Nebraska and Arkwright Streets in St. Paul by Habitat's WomenBuild project, which uses all-female volunteer crews. A fourth home on Stevens Avenue in Minneapolis was completed in fall 2001. All of the homes are being built with energy-efficient r25 insulation in the walls and mechanical ventilation to maintain indoor air quality. The State of Minnesota recently raised its building code for single-family residences, so these homes are also being built to the strictest standards in the nation.

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Visit the EPA Brownfields web site at:
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>



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The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Pilot and its partners hope to create an easily replicable model that will allow other affordable housing builders to similarly expand their capabilities. According to Stephen Seidel, executive director of Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, "As we at Twin Cities Habitat strive to meet the ever-increasing need for affordable housing in our community, it is essential that we have the capacity to consider every location that has the possibility of providing housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income people. Thanks to this collaboration [with the Brownfields Pilot and the Minnesota Environmental Initiative], generously supported by the Environmental Protection Agency, we are able to do just that." Because of successes like those of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Pilot, on February 13, 2002, EPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Habitat for Humanity to work in partnership to build energy-efficient homes on former brownfields throughout the country.

Less than 200 miles to the north, the small City of Virginia, Minnesota (population 9,410), has also enjoyed the benefits of a Brownfields Assessment Pilot award. Once the region's leading producer of iron ore and taconite, the City of Virginia and the surrounding area underwent a severe economic downturn during the 1980s. The city's unemployment and poverty rates remain among the highest in Minnesota. Most of the sites available for redevelopment are former industrial mining areas with uncertain degrees of contamination. The city established a Brownfields Task Force to identify the most promising sites for transformation and was awarded an EPA Brownfields Assessment grant in June 1999.



The Virginia Pilot focuses on brownfields adjacent to open-pit mines for redevelopment into low- to moderate-income residential space. Initial Pilot assessments of one such site found no need for cleanup. Based on that finding, the property was quickly sold, and construction began on a new senior citizen housing facility. The \$7.2 million redevelopment project includes a 24-bed facility for persons with Alzheimer's, an 89-unit assisted living facility, and 20 apartments. As many as 75 jobs will be created as a result of this project.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, an EPA Brownfields Pilot funded a \$27,500 assessment of the Bowser Pump site—a 12.5-acre property divided into three parcels within one of the most economically distressed areas in the state. Approximately 3,200 cubic yards of contaminated soil were eventually excavated, removed from the site, and disposed of. This portion, known as "Parcel B," was a storage site for 600,000 tires that caught fire and burned for three days in 1997, forcing the evacuation of more than 1,000 neighborhood residents and the adjacent Fort Wayne Police Department. The city spent nearly \$350,000 to demolish the remaining charred and unsafe buildings, and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) removed the remaining tires. A \$300,000 grant from HUD's Economic Development Initiative (EDI) will finance installation of a new public infrastructure that will support construction of 20 new homes on the site. Purchasers will also receive a five-year residential property tax abatement on their new homes. The first model home was completed in early 2000, and three additional homes are nearly complete.

Other EPA Brownfields Assessment Pilots, as well as other Brownfields Pilot types, are working to safely redevelop brownfields for residential reuse. In Stamford, Connecticut, an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund Pilot loan for \$250,000 was signed in October 1999 for a waterfront property where more than 300 apartments will be built. And in Dallas, Texas, a 22-acre vacant lot formerly home to motor freight and transportation facilities is being transformed into a \$35.3 million, multi-family housing and shopping development—a project that has already created 50 new construction jobs. For more information on EPA's Brownfields Pilots, contact your local EPA Region or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site, at [www.epa.gov/brownfields/](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields)